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Committees:
Judiciary (*Chair*)
Capital Budget



2004

LEGISLATIVE SESSION WRAP-UP

SERVING THE 26TH DISTRICT

Dear Friends,

First, let me say that it has been an honor and a privilege to serve as your State Representative in my fourth term in the House of Representatives. I have come to rely on many of you, as well as my colleagues in the Legislature, as a source of inspiration and knowledge. My commitment to the families and communities of the 26th Legislative District kept me focused through eight sessions now, including a short but extremely intense sixty-day session that just ended.

I would like to thank all of you who have called and written to me this past year. Your guidance plays an important role in how effectively I represent you in the Legislature. Your calls and letters show that you want lawmakers to ensure that good-paying jobs are available, that your children receive an affordable and first-class education, and that your families are well taken care of with accessible health care.

I believe the House of Representatives answered the call. We had some great successes; unfortunately, in many cases the House faced setbacks in the Senate, where many important pieces of legislation did not pass. Nevertheless, I, along with my Democratic colleagues will remain committed to improving the economy not just for business but for all of us in Washington.

Sincerely,

Pat Lantz

**LEGISLATIVE HOTLINE:
1 - 800 - 562 - 6000**

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1 - 800 - 635 - 9993**

STAYING IN TOUCH

As always, I value your thoughts and concerns on these and any other issues. Please feel free to contact me with any questions or comments; you can find my contact information here on the front page of this newsletter. Thank you again for giving me the opportunity to represent you in Olympia.

WHAT'S INSIDE:

- Medical Malpractice Liability Reform
- Affordable Housing
- Children's Health
- Commitment to Students
- Tax Relief for Seniors

PATRICIA LANTZ • SERVING THE 26TH DISTRICT

MEDICAL MALPRACTICE LIABILITY REFORM



There was much debate this year over how best to address medical malpractice-related problems confronting health care providers and facilities in Washington State. After speaking with numerous medical practitioners and consulting with national experts, I believe that a comprehensive approach is the only appropriate response to this very complex problem. There is no single entity or event that caused this problem, and there is no single solution to fix it.

At the beginning of the '04 session, I joined with other House and Senate Democrats, along with Governor Locke and Insurance Commissioner Mike Kreidler, to propose a comprehensive package of medical malpractice reforms to tackle the three main issues:

- **Increased patient safety:**

Statistics show that only five percent of medical practitioners cause most of the serious errors. Unfortunately, Washington ranks near the bottom on enforcement. If we are to solve this problem at the root cause, we must weed out those bad apples first. We can do this by improving the disciplinary policies and peer review of the health professions.

- **Malpractice insurance reform:**

Steps are needed to help assure that physicians and hospitals can get the insurance they need and stabilize their insurance rates;

- **Civil justice system reform:** Malpractice litigation is complex, time-consuming and costly. Reforms are needed to reduce the number, complexity, delays and costs of these cases without surrendering the constitutional rights of patients.

I prime sponsored several of the reforms contained in our legislative package to bring real reform to the liability system, which also contained several budget items, including an additional \$30 million for Medicaid reimbursement increases for deliveries and emergency room physicians. 43.4 percent of all babies born in our state are paid for by the Washington Medicaid program. In some rural areas, that number reaches as high as 70 percent. Recognizing the trouble that doctors — especially rural doctors — have covering the costs of these births, the House pushed hard to bring them instant relief.

Broken down, a doctor or midwife would have received an additional \$575 per delivery — an almost 30% increase per Medicaid reimbursement, helping doctors cover their costs. In

Pierce and Kitsap County, there is a combined total of 12,768 births, 4,927 paid for by Medicaid — an average of 39%. That means an increase of \$2,920,223 every year for doctors under the House plan. In addition, Emergency Room Physicians in the two counties would have received \$1,483,171 more per year.

Unfortunately, the Senate walked away from that \$30 million because it didn't include caps on medical malpractice awards. Therefore, this budget does not provide much-needed relief for doctors who staff emergency rooms and doctors who deliver babies.

Doctors and patients need help now. I, along with the House Democrats, wanted to provide some. But the Senate rejected nearly all of these reforms because of one sticking point — limits on the amount of money a victim of medical negligence can receive from a jury.

I remain strongly committed to finding solutions to medical malpractice related problems. Just as doctors must treat the whole patient rather than just one symptom, I believe that this complex problem demands a comprehensive solution — patient safety, insurance reform, and civil liability reform.

ENSURING AFFORDABLE HOUSING



It has become prohibitively expensive to build condominiums in Washington because builders cannot find liability insurance for construction. Recent manufacturing defects have driven up the costs so high that the market has almost completely dried up.

A bill that I sponsored addresses both aspects of this condominium crisis; the absence of builder insurance and the problems with construction defects. My bill provides incentives for builders to buy insurance and for insurers to see that homeowners get a quality home. This bill can help restore the condominium market by providing predictability in the insurance market, while separating the issues of liability for construction defects from other issues of liability such as personal injury and property damage.

2004 LEGISLATIVE SESSION WRAP-UP

OUR COMMITMENT TO STUDENTS

I have always been a strong advocate for greater investments and reforms of our Public Education system. We must provide greater access and funding for both K-12 and higher education in Washington to ensure that new business development and innovation continue to generate economic growth in the future. Some of the key pieces of legislation to pass this year help schools and students achieve the level of education necessary to compete and succeed in a global economy.

We accomplished great reforms for K-12 Education by allowing retakes of the WASL for students and increased levy capacities for school districts. In addition, a limited number of Charter Schools will be allowed under strict

accountability and School Board oversight.

We also gave our colleges and universities an additional \$10 million and increased financial aid for college students by \$7 million so our students can receive the quality education they need to land jobs in the 21st century economy.

\$10 million in the budget to pay for 3,000 more enrollments at our colleges and universities.

\$7 million in enrollments so more students can earn degrees in high-demand fields like nursing, computer science, and biotech.

\$4.3 million in the budget for more Promise Scholarships so students afford to attend college.

PREVENTING AND PROTECTING VICTIMS OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

Last summer the Crystal Brame tragedy opened our eyes to the threat of domestic violence, especially among law enforcement personnel. The reaction to her death



At the domestic violence bill signing with Erlene Twidt and the Governor. Erlene was named the Citizen of the Year for her work on the Key Peninsula with DV.

prompted concerned citizens to re-examine law enforcement policies when dealing with one of their own accused of spousal abuse.

I was proud to prime sponsor the legislation that resulted from the Task Force set up to make sure it never happens again. The legislation requires law enforcement agencies to develop a set of guidelines to address domestic violence among their own.

The Legislature also passed a comprehensive package of bills to protect victims, including restricting police officers from carrying a weapon in a courtroom when involved in alle-

gations of domestic violence. In addition, victims of domestic violence will be allowed to terminate rental agreements without paying additional rent and prohibits landlords from evicting or refusing to rent to them. The final supplemental budget also includes \$2 million for domestic violence shelters.

These steps ensure that we remove any barriers preventing victims of domestic violence from escaping the abuse. I am pleased that Governor Locke has recently signed the package into law.

CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Washington's health care system was severely affected by challenges of recent years, as low-income families, employers of low-wage workers, and the health insurers looked to the state for a lifeline. Because health care costs are such a significant part of the state budget, all citizens, as taxpayers, were affected. Due to cuts in last year's budget, 20,000 children lost out on health coverage.



House Democrats were committed to restoring those cuts this year, and were successful in keeping Medicaid eligibility for kids at 200% of poverty level. We also successfully blocked efforts by the Senate to require co-pays for all participating families, even those far below the federal poverty level.

Improving the health and safety of children were some of my top priorities for the 2004 Session. Led by the Washington Compassion, Accountability, Reform, and Economic Security (CARES) Task Force on health and human services, House Democrats developed and championed a family-friendly agenda focused on preserving the state's fragile safety net.

Through a combination of policy changes and funding priorities, House Democrats were successful in making positive changes in the lives of vulnerable children and struggling families all across the state. These positive changes focused on increasing access to supportive services for kinship caregivers and homeless families, and making DSHS work smarter for children entering, or at risk of entering, the foster care system.

TAX RELIEF FOR SENIORS

Our state's senior citizens – especially those living on fixed incomes — often find it hard to make ends meet. They should not be forced out of their homes because they cannot afford rising property taxes. The Legislature was able to expand senior property-tax relief to an additional 40,000 retirees by increasing the eligibility from \$30,000 to \$35,000. Seniors will also be allowed to deduct their Medicare insurance costs when calculating their eligibility. This legislation is the first expansion of senior property-tax relief in Washington State since 1998, when the current \$30,000 eligibility ceiling was enacted.

BURLEY OLALLA

Thanks to the overwhelming community interest from concerned citizens like you, the Burley-Olalla interchange project was bumped up the project list, despite reluctance by other members of the Legislature who felt that their projects would be delayed.

The Transportation Package passed last year funds the future construction of the interchange and there is an interim safety project that will be built, but we achieved success in expediting the Burley Olalla project an additional year.

I am however committed to finding opportunities to keep the project moving, and, if possible, advancing the schedule even further.

SKANSIE PARK

I was very happy to have included in the Capital Budget \$406,260 for the development of Skansie Park in downtown Gig Harbor.

The Washington Wildlife and Recreation Coalition, of which I am a member – helps local, state and tribal agencies create new parks and protect wildlife habitat in Washington's communities. When finished, Skansie Park will have waterfront access for fishing, canoeing and kayaking as well as multipurpose, open grass uplands and tidelands. It will also include picnic tables, park benches and a covered gathering space for community events. This will be the only urban park with waterfront boating access in Gig Harbor, and will be a beautiful addition to our community.

CRACKING DOWN ON DRUNK DRIVING

Even with our heightened crackdown on drunk drivers over the past decade, there are still too many people killed on our roads each year. A significant number of those driving drunk are repeat offenders – drivers who already have a DUI on their record. In fact, one-third of all DUI arrests each year are drivers already convicted of driving drunk.

Fortunately, the technology now exists to keep convicted drunk drivers off the road. Legislation that I strongly advocated for this past year will be a breakthrough in the fight to prevent these unnecessary deaths. Under this new law, drivers guilty of driving drunk will now be required to install an ignition interlock in their car, even if they are first-time offenders. Ignition interlocks are alcohol-analyzing devices designed to prevent a person with alcohol in his or her system from starting a car. Each time they go to start their car they must blow into the device, similar to a breathalyzer test.

Over the years, the campaign against drunk driving has increased public awareness about its dangers. This new law takes care of the habitual offenders; the ones that can't seem to shake the habit. If they can't shake the habit, the ignition interlock will do it for them.